

From the Weston Historical Society archives...

My Life in Weston Village (1935 to 1945)

Part 2: Weston Media Entertainment

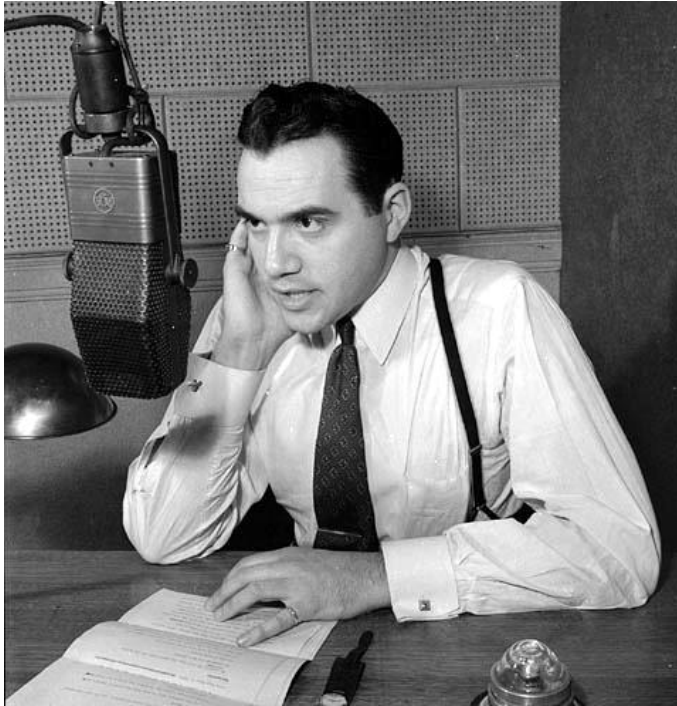
by Jean Gove-Carbone



Weston Theatre, c. 1945

It was a school morning in the late 1930s. I was dressed in my navy blue tunic and blue pants and was headed out the door for King Street Public School. I always enjoyed the morning walk to KSPS as I liked classes and all other aspects of school. My mum turned the radio on every morning so that she could tune in to the newscast.

I could hear the station signing off as I was leaving the house: "This is Lorne Greene, CFRB in Toronto." I heard those words hundreds of times through my grade school and high school days. Lorne Greene, in later years, left Toronto and moved to California where he became better known - at least outside Toronto - as Ben Cartwright in the very successful and long running series, 'Bonanza.'



Lorne Greene broadcasting over the CBC national network. Dec. 1942. Credit: Ronny Jaques / National Film Board of Canada / Library and Archives Canada / PA-116178

Television was not even imaginable in those days. Our one and only radio at home was very important to us for hearing local, national, and international newscasts and for evening entertainment, featuring popular figures like Jack Benny and his sidekick Rochester.

The size of the radio and its cabinet rendered it a large piece of furniture in our living room. It was three feet or more in height, at least twenty inches wide, and more than a foot in depth. Near the top and in the center was a lighted dial with numbers. There was a knob on each side of the dial - one to change stations and the other to adjust the volume. Below were two large doors which could be opened to expose thick brown fabric. This whole unit stood on four short stubby feet and was actually rather attractive.



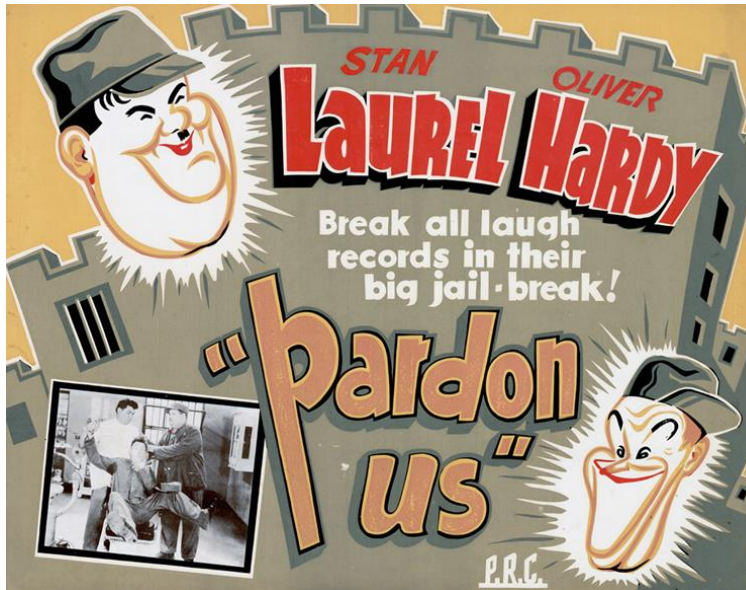


Radio broadcasts featuring Jack Benny (pictured third from left) and his sidekick "Rochester" (second from right) were immensely popular in Canada during the days before television. Here, in a photograph dated February 11, 1943, Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King (far right) talks with members of the Jack Benny comedy troupe. Credit: National Film Board of Canada/Library and Archives Canada/C-071096

Our school let students out at 3:30 p.m. and I would hurry home to change out of my tunic as I had to wear it the next day. I would then start on my homework. At 5 p.m. the first of my favorite programs came on, and I would sit inches away from the radio to hear "The Lone Ranger and Tonto." After that, it was "The Shadow." My kind mother would let me eat dinner in front of the radio, without moving, so that I didn't miss one word of the exciting action. These are very pleasant memories.

Saturdays were very much anticipated as there was no school and lots for kids to do. One option was the movie matinee. The admission price was twelve cents. Evening admission for kids went up to eighteen cents. We didn't go to the evening shows as much because they were later and cost more. Also, the farmers would come to town in the evening for the movie and back then people sometimes didn't bathe until Saturday night, meaning that the stuffy theater might not smell very pleasant during the show!

The matinee was well attended with the theatre nearly always full with kids. Western movies were the usual fare for at least half of all showings. In those early Hollywood days, the big names were Gene Autry and Hopalong Cassidy - they always brought out the fans. Roy Rogers and Dale Evans were sure to please too. Sometimes when a Western was not playing, we enjoyed Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland in some lighthearted fare. Other times, if we were lucky, it might be Laurel and Hardy - big crowd favorites!



Perennial favourites Laurel and Hardy. This poster was released in 1931 to coincide with the premier of this film in Canadian theatres. Credit: Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. R1300-11

Shirley Temple also delighted, as did Jane Withers. There was a series of Tarzan movies with much tree-top action, which audiences loved. Before the main feature, a cartoon would be shown. All cartoons were received with cheers and applause, but if it happened to be Bugs Bunny, the audience went wild with excitement and shouts of glee. Clearly, Bugs was the best of all. And if all the yelling made you thirsty, during breaks you could buy bottled drinks for five cents. The glass bottles sat in a tub filled with icy water and floated on the surface. Orange Crush was a favorite, hands down. No one chose Coca Cola!



The Lobby of Weston Theatre. Credit: Archives of Ontario RG 56-11-0-347

There were no movie ratings in the 1930s - all movies were for general audiences. I remember that on one occasion special cards were printed about an upcoming movie. They read, in bold letters, "WE DARE YOU TO SEE IT!" These cards, about 8" x 10", were attached by the dozens to the marquee near the entrance of the theatre. It created quite a stir. I remember that the story line was about life in a royal court and that the ladies' dresses were the reason for the warning. By today's standards the dresses (which were not overly low cut) would border on the conservative, but seventy years ago these outfits were universally viewed as being very risqué. So much for the passage of time.

For some unknown reason, I remember only one movie title from those long-past days, and yet I must have seen hundreds of movies. This special one was called, "Jamaica Inn" and I remember it as being wonderfully exciting and adventurous. I wonder what I would think if I could see it today.



Two views of the interior of Weston Theatre, Credit: Archives of Ontario 56-11-0-347

On hot summer days in Weston, the theatre owners, Mr. and Mrs. Scott, would hire a girl in her late teens to sit outside the theatre to sell ice cream. She would have two large ice cream containers inside a large metal cart with a lid, and the whole contraption was on wheels. Chocolate was always in one container, and the other varied between vanilla and strawberry.

The price for two large scoops, a "double-decker" as it was called, was five cents. This kind-hearted young lady was known, on occasion, to give a single scoop to kids who had no ice cream money.

Back in the late 1930s, a movie fan could write a letter to a Hollywood star requesting a photo. No address and no zip code were needed - just the star's name with the line "Hollywood, California." Postage was three cents. I never did this as I did not have the money readily available for the stamp, but I had a girlfriend down the street in Weston who wrote regularly, and sure enough, the requested photos would arrive in due course. She would call me to come and see them.

Some photos were very good, and were plainly professionally done, while others were not nearly so attractive and must have been taken by amateurs. Hollywood was quite different in those early days. In my humble opinion, it was much better then, than it is now.



Jean Gove-Carbone, shown here beside the Humber River (at age 11), is the youngest daughter of Ida and James Gilbert Gove. In October 2009, Heritage Toronto memorialized James Gove's contribution to Weston with a commemorative plaque, which was placed in Little Avenue Memorial Park. From 1930 to about 1960, Mr. Gove, a master stonemason, built Weston's distinctive Humberstone walls and beautiful memorial Cenotaph.